



AMERICAN EMBASSY QUITO - ECUADOR

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Special Edition American Citizen Newsletter: Natural Disasters

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Letter from American Citizens Services Chief

Dear Resident Americans:

I hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the holiday season. This special edition of the American Citizen Newsletter is dedicated to natural disasters, emergency preparedness, and emergency response. As you are all aware, Ecuador's location on an active fault line and its many volcanoes make it prone to natural disasters. In this issue, we hope to communicate to you the real risk of a life-threatening disaster occurring in Ecuador and offer practical and necessary steps to take in order to better prepare yourself and your family.

First, we encourage every American citizen in Ecuador to register with the Embassy at www.travelregistration.state.gov and provide a valid email address. We regularly email our registrants pertinent information regarding safety and security and we will use email to disseminate information regarding everything from an impending volcanic eruption to proper procedures in the aftermath of an earthquake.

The two natural disasters most likely to affect resident Americans in Ecuador are volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Ecuador is home to 11 active volcanoes and another 11 potentially active volcanoes. Three volcanoes are actively erupting at this moment. Volcano Cotopaxi erupts approximately every 100 years – its last major eruption was 125 years ago. In the event of a major eruption, mud and lava would flow in the vicinity of the eruption and water, electricity and phones services could be disrupted. Many roads may be closed due to the heavy fall of ash. With modern monitoring equipment, the Government of Ecuador and U.S. Embassy would hopefully be able to warn all Americans of a volcanic eruption in advance. That said, proper preparation is critical in order to safely respond to a significant eruption. In this issue, we offer steps all Americans can take to better prepare themselves.

Earthquakes are another significant worry and are perhaps more difficult to react to since there is little or no advance warning. Like a volcanic eruption, a major earthquake could disrupt telecommunications, electricity, and close local roads. According to historical records, there is a large earthquake in Ecuador every 13 years – the last significant earthquake occurred 21 years ago. In this issue, we also offer practical steps all Americans can take to better prepare and respond to an earthquake in Ecuador.

We hope that you find the information in this newsletter helpful. Through proper planning, all Americans can better prepare themselves to respond to a natural disaster in Ecuador.

Sincerely,

Bo Palmer
American Citizen Services Chief

Volcano Preparation and Response



Explosive volcanoes blast hot solid and molten rock fragments and gases into the air. As a result, ashflows can occur on all sides of a volcano and ash can fall hundreds of miles downwind. Dangerous mudflows and floods can occur in valleys leading away from volcanoes.

If you live near a known volcano, active or dormant, be prepared to follow instructions from Ecuadorian emergency officials.

Before:

Learn about your community warning systems and emergency plans.

Be prepared for the hazards that can accompany volcanoes:

- Mudflows and flash floods
- Landslides and rockfalls
- Earthquakes
- Ashfall and acid rain

Make evacuation plans. If you live in a known volcanic hazard area, plan a route out and have a backup route in mind.

Develop an emergency communication plan. In case family members are separated from one another during a volcanic eruption (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together. Ask an out-of-state relative or

friend to serve as the “family contact,” because after a disaster, it’s often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

Have disaster supplies on hand:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water (see suggestions for quantities and storage at: https://www.crossnet.org/preparedness/cdc_english/FoodWater.asp)
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Dust mask
- Sturdy shoes

Get a pair of goggles and a throw-away breathing mask for each member of the household in case of ashfall.

During:

Follow the evacuation orders and travel advisories issued by authorities.

Avoid areas downwind and river valleys downstream of the volcano.

If caught indoors:

- Close all windows, doors, and dampers.
- Put all machinery inside a garage or barn.
- Bring animals and livestock into closed shelters.

If trapped outdoors:

- Seek shelter indoors.
- If caught in a rockfall, roll into a ball to protect your head.
- If caught near a stream, be aware of mudflows. Move up slope, especially if you hear the roar of a mudflow.

Protect yourself during ashfall:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use goggles to protect your eyes.
- Use a dust mask or hold a damp cloth over your face to help breathing.
- Keep car or truck engines off.

EVACUATION

Although it may seem safe to stay at home and wait out an eruption, if you are in a hazardous zone, doing so could be very dangerous. Stay safe. Follow authorities’ instructions and put your disaster plan into action.

Stay out of the area defined as a restricted zone by government officials. Effects of a volcanic eruption can be experienced many miles from a volcano. Mudflows and flash flooding, wildland fires, and even deadly hot ashflow can reach you even if you cannot see the volcano during an eruption. Avoid river valleys and low lying areas. Trying to watch an erupting volcano up close is a deadly idea.

Listen to a battery-operated radio or television for the latest emergency information.

After: If possible, stay away from volcanic ashfall areas.

When outside:

- Cover your mouth and nose. Volcanic ash can irritate your respiratory system.
- Wear goggles to protect your eyes.
- Keep skin covered to avoid irritation from contact with ash.

Clear roofs of ashfall. Ashfall is very heavy and can cause buildings to collapse. Exercise great caution when working on a roof.

Avoid driving in heavy ashfall. Driving will stir up more ash that can clog engines and stall vehicles.

If you have a respiratory ailment, avoid contact with any amount of ash. Stay indoors until local health officials advise it is safe to go outside.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance — infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

MUDFLOWS

Mudflows are powerful “rivers” of mud that can move 20 to 40 mph. Hot ash or lava from a volcanic eruption can rapidly melt snow and ice at the summit of a volcano. The melt water quickly mixes with falling ash, with soil cover on lower slopes, and with debris in its path. This turbulent mixture is dangerous in stream channels and can travel more than 50 miles away from a volcano. Also intense rainfall can erode fresh volcanic deposits to form large mudflows. If you see the water level of a stream begin to rise, quickly move to high ground. If a mud-flow is approaching or passes a bridge, stay away from the bridge.

Earthquake Preparation and Response

One of the most frightening and destructive phenomena of nature is a severe earthquake and its terrible aftereffects.

Earthquakes strike suddenly, violently, and without warning at any time of the day or night. If an earthquake occurs in a populated area, it may cause many deaths and injuries and extensive property damage.

Although there are no guarantees of safety during an earthquake, identifying potential hazards ahead of time and advance planning can save lives and significantly reduce injuries and property damage. The American Red Cross provides the below information to better prepare and respond to an earthquake.

What to Do Before an Earthquake

Earthquakes strike suddenly, violently and without warning. Identifying potential hazards ahead of time and advance planning can reduce the dangers of serious injury or loss of life from an earthquake. Repairing deep plaster cracks in ceilings and foundations, anchoring overhead lighting fixtures to the ceiling, and following local seismic building standards, will help reduce the impact of earthquakes.

Five Ways to Plan Ahead

1. Check for Hazards in the Home

- Fasten shelves securely to walls.
- Place large or heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Store breakable items such as bottled foods, glass, and china in low, closed cabinets with latches.
- Hang heavy items such as pictures and mirrors away from beds, couches, and anywhere people sit.
- Brace overhead light fixtures.
- Repair defective electrical wiring and leaky gas connections. These are potential fire risks.
- Secure a water heater by strapping it to the wall studs and bolting it to the floor.
- Repair any deep cracks in ceilings or foundations. Get expert advice if there are signs of structural defects.
- Store weed killers, pesticides, and flammable products securely in closed cabinets with latches and on bottom shelves.

2. Identify Safe Places Indoors and Outdoors

- Under sturdy furniture such as a heavy desk or table.
- Against an inside wall.
- Away from where glass could shatter around windows, mirrors, pictures, or where heavy bookcases or other heavy furniture could fall over.
- In the open, away from buildings, trees, telephone and electrical lines, overpasses, or elevated expressways.

3. Educate Yourself and Family Members

- Teach children how and when to call emergency officials, police, or fire department and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.
- Teach all family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity, and water.

4. Have Disaster Supplies on Hand

- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- Portable battery-operated radio and extra batteries.
- First aid kit and manual.

5. Emergency food and water

- Nonelectric can opener.
- Essential medicines.
- Cash and credit cards.
- Sturdy shoes.

6. Develop an Emergency Communication Plan

- In case family members are separated from one another during an earthquake (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), develop a plan for reuniting after the disaster.
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

What to Do During an Earthquake

Be aware that some earthquakes are actually foreshocks and a larger earthquake might follow—do not assume that it is “just a small one.” Minimize your movements to a few steps to a nearby safe place and stay indoors until the shaking has stopped and you are sure exiting is safe.

If indoors

- **DROP** to the ground; take **COVER** by getting under a sturdy table or other piece of furniture; and **HOLD ON** until the shaking stops. If there isn't a table or desk near you, cover your face and head with your arms and crouch in an inside corner of the building.
- Stay away from glass, windows, outside doors and walls, and anything that could fall, such as lighting fixtures or furniture.
- Stay in bed if you are there when the earthquake strikes. Hold on and protect your head with a pillow, unless you are under a heavy light fixture that could fall. In that case, move to the nearest safe place.
- Use a doorway for shelter only if it is in close proximity to you and if you know it is a strongly supported, loadbearing doorway.
- Stay inside until shaking stops and it is safe to go outside. Research has shown that most injuries occur when people inside buildings attempt to move to a different location inside the building or try to leave.
- Be aware that the electricity may go out or the sprinkler systems or fire alarms may turn on.
- DO NOT use the elevators.

If outdoors

- Stay there.
- Move away from buildings, streetlights, and utility wires.
- Once in the open, stay there until the shaking stops. The greatest danger exists directly outside buildings, at exits, and alongside exterior walls. Many earthquake fatalities occur when people run outside of buildings only to be killed by falling debris from collapsing walls. Ground movement during an earthquake is seldom the direct cause of

death or injury. Most earthquake-related casualties result from collapsing walls, flying glass, and falling objects.

If in a moving vehicle

- Stop as quickly as safety permits and stay in the vehicle. Avoid stopping near or under buildings, trees, overpasses, and utility wires.
- Proceed cautiously once the earthquake has stopped. Avoid roads, bridges, or ramps that might have been damaged by the earthquake.

If trapped under debris

- Do not light a match.
- Do not move about or kick up dust.
- Cover your mouth with a handkerchief or clothing.
- Tap on a pipe or wall so rescuers can locate you. Use a whistle if one is available. Shout only as a last resort. Shouting can cause you to inhale dangerous amounts of dust.

What to Do After an Earthquake

- **Expect aftershocks.** These secondary shockwaves are usually less violent than the main quake but can be strong enough to do additional damage to weakened structures and can occur in the first hours, days, weeks, or even months after the quake.
- **Listen to a battery-operated radio or television.** Listen for the latest emergency information.
- **Use the telephone only for emergency calls.**
- **Open cabinets cautiously.** Beware of objects that can fall off shelves.
- **Stay away from damaged areas.** Stay away unless your assistance has been specifically requested by police, fire, or relief organizations. Return home only when authorities say it is safe.
- **Be aware of possible tsunamis if you live in coastal areas.** These are also known as seismic sea waves (mistakenly called "tidal waves"). When local authorities issue a tsunami warning, assume that a series of dangerous waves is on the way. Stay away from the beach.
- **Help injured or trapped persons.** Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance such as infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Give first aid where appropriate. Do not move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Call for help.
- **Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline or other flammable liquids immediately.** Leave the area if you smell gas or fumes from other chemicals.

- **Inspect the entire length of chimneys for damage.** Unnoticed damage could lead to a fire.
- **Inspect utilities.**
 - **Check for gas leaks.** If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.
 - **Look for electrical system damage.** If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.
 - **Check for sewage and water lines damage.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap.

Hours and Contact Information

The U.S. Embassy in Quito and Consulate in Guayaquil provide a full range of consular and passport services for American citizens. Please [click here](#) to access Quito's website for information on opening hours, contact information and general information on each our services.

Please [click here](#) for Consulate Guayaquil's general information.

The U.S. Embassy in Quito and Consulate in Guayaquil is closed on Ecuadorian and American holidays. In the coming months, we will observe the following holidays:

[November](#)

27th: Thanksgiving

[December](#)

25th: Christmas

[January](#)

1st: New Years Day

19th: Martin Luther King Day

[February](#)

16th: Washington's Birthday

23rd & 24th: Carnival

Contact information and opening hours

Quito: <http://ecuador.usembassy.gov/overview-and-contact-info.html>

Guayaquil: http://guayaquil.usconsulate.gov/business_hours.html

Quito American Citizen Services

Notarials:

Monday - Thursday
1:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

All Other Services:

Monday – Thursday
1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Social Security:

Tuesday – Thursday
1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Telephone Inquiries: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Tel: (593) 398-5000 EXT. 5077 (Only Social Security)

Telephones:

Tel: (593) 398-5000

Fax: (593) 398-5268

For calls concerning the arrest, injury, serious illness, or death of an American citizen after regular business hours (5:00 p.m. - 8:00 a.m.), please call:

(593) 398-5200

E-mail:

General e-mail: Consularquito@state.gov

Guayaquil American Citizen Services

Passport and Consular Report of Birth Abroad (CRBA) services are available by appointment only Mondays through Thursdays, from 12 noon to 3:30 p.m. Notarials are available by appointment Fridays from 08:30 to 11:30 pm. Please use the following link http://guayaquil.usconsulate.gov/online_appointments.html to schedule an appointment online. Emergency requests for services can be directed to our email address and office

number.

- Via Email: acsguayaquil@state.gov

Please do not send your visa inquiries to this e-mail address.

- Via Telephone: Mondays through Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at (04) 232-3570 ext. 227 or 228

Please do not use these extensions for visa inquiries.

- In person: Mondays through Thursdays from 12:00 noon to 3:30 p.m. at the U.S. Consulate in Guayaquil, 2nd Floor.

For American Citizen Emergencies outside normal business hours, please call (04) 232-1152.

For business other than American Citizens Services, Immigrant Visas, or Non-Immigrant Visas, call (04) 232-3570 Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.